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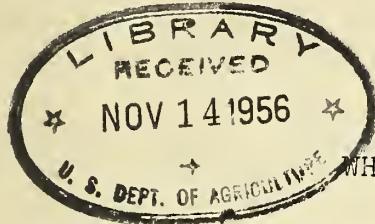


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW*

In discussing this occasion with one of your committee, she asked me this:

"How can a woman best gauge her progress and success in business when her career begins to mature and develop? Are there any barriers for women in modern education, industry or allied fields that it is impossible to hurdle, given the same ability as a man might bring to the job?"

Your committee-woman, felt, and I agree with her, that perhaps we might spend a few minutes profitably discussing these points. Certainly they must be in all your minds from time to time as they are also in mine. Of course, there is no single, simple answer to these questions, and if there were, no single individual could cover the answer for each of you. Like all human relationships, the one of employer and employee is complicated, varied and frequently unpredictable.

Also, like every relationship that involves both men and women, the feminine element adds something to the equation not present where men alone are concerned. It would be foolish and unrealistic not to recognize this added element wherever women in business are concerned. For my part, I wish neither to eliminate nor to minimize it. As a generalization it is perfectly safe to predict the continued expansion of the feminine influence in American business--including more and more important executive posts. This is so sure that it is scarcely debatable. You are all in a field of expanding opportunity--that is certain.

But I dislike broad generalizations, which, like a Mother Hubbard, cover everything and touch nothing in clear outline. I should like, if I may, to present now a kind of formula or recipe that I have worked out for myself, and which I have seen others use (consciously or otherwise) with good success. It is a method of self-analysis which involves asking oneself a list of questions. My own experience indicates that the sum of these answers is likely to shed a good deal of light on the state of one's progress. Answer only to yourself.

These questions, of course, apply mainly in fields where the job assignment is of an executive nature. My personal definition of an executive is somebody who operates largely on his own. And so, if your job puts you to any extent

*An address by Lawrence B. Sizer, Divisional Vice President and Sales Promotion Manager, Marshall Field & Company, at the Home Economics in Business Convention, in Boston, on July 8, 1950.
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on your own in developing and carrying it out, these questions should apply to you. You will note that some of them are quite broad in their application. At first glance they may seem to you to have little bearing on the question of year-end bonuses, titles or promotions. And yet, I am convinced that these questions strike at the heart of the matter in giving you some means by which to evaluate your own position and progress in your field.

The first question sounds like a bromide. But the doctors tell us that bromides are sometimes as dangerous as dynamite--and so is this question. It's short and to the point.

1. Are you happy?

Don't answer too quickly--either way. One of the most important things to decide before you answer is another subsidiary question. Do the people in your organization like you? There are several kinds of likes--and they include respect for your business ability, your personality or appearance, your ability to maintain authority without creating resentment, and many others.

But the sum of all these answers has a great bearing on your probable future in business, education or public service. To be sure, business is not a popularity contest. The kind of "like" I'm talking about goes deeper than just being a good egg in arranging office parties. It is, indeed, a fundamental evidence of your character and fitness for your job--because, you see, happy people are the best liked by their associates.

And to be happy in business, you must be basically happy. An associate once said to me, "Sometimes you seem to run a sort of 'Lonely Hearts Club'. Your people are forever bringing you their personal problems as well as business ones. How do you tell where business stops and personal life begins?" To which I replied:

"I don't try to make any distinction because to my mind there isn't any. Whenever you find an individual in creative work (and that includes all executives--major and minor) you find a closely intertwined set of problems.

"Unhappiness in a business connection is apt to be a reflection of unhappiness somewhere else--and vice versa. Many more people suffer from misfits in their total picture than in their business association."

Occasionally, unhappy people make good executives. This I am sure of--because I've worked with them. But the reverse is far truer, and is a formula immensely easier to work out. And of course, all good executives have in common a dissatisfaction with things as they are, and a constructive urge to make them better. But a basic maladjustment in any compartment of your life is certain to show through in business. The best way to find the answer to this first question is to analyze the reactions of your fellow employees toward you. This you will have to do for yourself--for if you ask them they will not tell you frankly, and probably they should not. But you can find the answer by yourself if you really go after it.

Whatever the field you work in, there are three kinds of personal relationships for each of you in business, and each is important. They are first, your relationship with your organizational superiors; second, your equals, and third, those down the line. Each set of relationships requires a different technique, and each must be studied and solved as a special problem. If you handle any two sets of them well, you are lucky. And if you are tops in all three--you can stop worrying about your future.

You are apt to find that if your relationships with all three are good, then you are a happy individual who knows her job, inspires others, and has an exciting and prosperous career ahead. If you handle any two of them badly--you had better go deeper into the answer for question No. 1.

In any case, you must answer "yes" to question No. 1 if you are to get to the top. If for any reason your answer is "no," a thorough analysis of your whole picture--at business and away from it--is indicated with remedial steps a must if you would succeed.

All the remaining questions have a bearing on this first one. All are difficult to answer, but rewarding as guideposts to a recipe for your personal success Number 2 is this:

2. Can you distinguish between essentials and non-essentials?

In my kind of business one inevitably encounters numbers of successful business leaders at fairly close range. They are seen under varying conditions, many of them out of the line of normal business contacts. Over a period of time, you get a pretty good look--and you do some thinking. Years ago I tried to discover the common denominator among topflight business men and women. Some were brilliant and erratic; others slow and methodical--but all made the answers come out right at the end. How, I asked myself, do they take such sharply different routes and land at the same terminus?

Close observation soon revealed that no matter how different they might be, all had one thing in common--and that was the ability to differentiate between the essential and the non-essential elements in any given situation. This applied to their total approach to their job, and to the details of it as well. Presented with any proposition, they moved with uncanny precision to the heart of the matter, and tackled it, sweeping the trivia aside.

Top flight executives are a good deal like a top flight bird dog. Some sixth sense--partly a gift and partly acquired--enables them to point with unerring accuracy at the target.

That's why my second question is about your judgment of essentials. The first is about happiness--and if you are unhappy in your job you had better change either yourself or your job, because ultimate success is likely not for you. You see--your whole sense of values has to be right before you can spot essentials.

But in a world of increasing complexity the ability to sort out the essentials of a given problem and ignore the rest is next in line of importance to your basic adjustment. The simple matter of your own sanity and health requires the development of that ability. Too many people wear themselves out by leaping in full cry after every rabbit, squirrel, or red herring that crosses their path. The successful man and woman ignore them--and having located the point, stick to it through all distraction.

The third question bears directly on the second. Here it is:

3-Are you predictable under pressure?

You know, it's easy to fly a big transport plane in a clear, still sky, 12,000 feet above smooth terrain. Almost anybody with a sense of balance and some mechanical background can do it. But when you make a flight from Boston to Chicago or Los Angeles you aren't interested in a pilot whose qualifications end there. When you put your life in somebody's hands you want to know what he'll do when something goes wrong in the takeoff. You want to know what he knows about storms--when to go around them and when to stay out of them and on the ground. You want to know what he will do when a mountain suddenly looms up through a cloud ahead. You want to know what will happen if he has to make an instrument landing with a low ceiling. In short, you want to know whether he can always be depended on to do the right thing when the going is rough.

Anybody running a business, an institution, or part of it, wants to know the same kind of thing about you. He's putting his economic life in your hands, and his decision to trust you (if he is a good executive himself) will be based on your performance and consistency under pressure--not when things are easy.

Well, how do you look from that standpoint? Give yourself a rating. What happens when everything breaks wrong for you? If you think you're being discriminated against or passed by, do you take your hands off the controls and let the plane take care of itself? What do you think of first in any emergency--your personal safety or that of the people and the authority in your charge? How much does it take to make you run for cover in panic, or to sell out an associate to save your own skin? That's a question your boss asks--so it's a good one to ask yourself.

Any top executive must establish a clear-cut, pattern which will tell his associates and superiors in advance how he will react under pressure. He must adhere to that pattern until it becomes a part of his makeup. It must be consistent, predictable, unvarying. Without such a pattern you are unlikely to go far in business.

The fourth question is a part of the third. How you react under pressure indicates an answer to the fourth query which is this:

4. Do you have personal integrity?

In its simplest application, this question means, "will you do what is right--or what's expedient?" This question has little bearing on whether you will falsify the books or dip into the cash drawer. The quality of intellectual honesty is a far scarcer commodity than honesty in money matters. But intellectual honesty is so much a part of the answers to the first three questions, that it cannot be separated from them.

You can't really be happy without intellectual honesty. That's a part of question No. 1. It is the basic essential in evaluating any business situation--so it gets all mixed up with question No. 2, and you can't be predictable under pressure if you lack intellectual honesty--so the first four questions seem to hang pretty closely.

Question No. 5 is this:

5. Do you understand the business or the institution you work for?

Sounds a bit silly? If you were a public relations man you wouldn't think so. Half the public statements of company representatives (some of them in fairly high places) reveal an abysmal ignorance of the basic purposes of the business they represent.

The real question is: Why does the business exist? What does it believe in? Where did it come from--and most important of all--where is it going? If you think these are easy to answer try supplying them offhand in terms of a press release about your business or institution. They get into the very heart of business--deep into a thing called policy.

Businesses, like individuals, have personalities. These are made up of policies which are a set of standards to which the business adheres. The integrity of the business is directly related to the degree in which such adherence is carried out. That in turn depends on the understanding by you and others of all its policies, why they were adopted, and what their real significance is.

Now this moves right back again into the previous questions we have asked--only this time to answer question 5 you've got to answer questions 1 through 4 in terms not of yourself but of your business! Do you begin to see why this one isn't easy? A business--precisely like a person--must display its integrity under pressure. It must follow principles, not expedience. This, of course, can be brought about only by people who know the policies and principles of the business in letter perfect form and have the courage to stick to them. This, then, means you. Do you know all the basic policies, aims and goals of your business so well that you can exemplify them? If you do, then you have one important thing in your possession that makes for success in any organization.

The need for interpretation of important policies sometimes becomes a part of our job before we are aware of it. Before we know it we're voicing or acting

out some essential policies--occasionally, I fear, without sufficient understanding or preparation. As we advance in an organization this function builds up--still, quite often, growing more rapidly than we are aware of, and still entering an area where our ideas are sketchy or unsound. I hazard the guess that about one in three people in important business positions lack the thorough grounding in policy that their job needs.

I once knew a college football player who gained for his team a total of several hundred yards in a season simply by knowing every rule in the book letter perfect. The following year he was elected captain--in a walkaway.

This is more than just knowing the details of your job. This means knowing the whole company, its aims, goals, ideals and anatomy. How do you rate on that score?

Number 6 in this list is one of those revealing questions that psychiatrists love to ask. For the moment let's forget your psyche, and inquire strictly on the basis of your probable future career. Here it is:

6. For what reasons would you change firms or employer?..

Be careful how you answer this one because the reasons you will give will tell a great deal about you. Be sure the reasons you give are really the ones that would cause you to act.

If you follow my hunch about successful people your answer to this question will be all wrapped up with the preceding one. Specifically, you will change your business association only when and if you find some other one with a better set of basic policies, and a better record of living up to them.

Perhaps you will not agree with me, offhand, that salary, title and position are actually second in importance to company policies so far as your personal interests are concerned.

If an individual agrees unreservedly with the policies of a company or an institution then there is very little reason for leaving them. Sound policies govern the methods of promotion and salary. They include and govern every kind of service or goods the organization plans to supply its clients or customers, and set standards of quality and performance in every category.

So if you can learn to understand and carry out a company's policies and if those policies strike you as sound--my advice is not to let anything sway you from your career with that company. You may have to pass up some apparently ripe opportunities. My observation is that there is only one opportunity worth taking--and that is to follow the finest set of policies you can find. If they're in your own back yard already--then stay there. If you like what you're doing and the policies are right, and you master and follow them religiously--then you'll go far where you are.

And here is the last, but by no means the least, question to ask yourself. Believe me, it will have a bearing on your success. Here it is:

7-Do you recognize and accept your responsibilities as a member of the community, the nation, and the world?

Nearly all of the successful men and women I have observed have in common the ability to lift and draw others upward along with them. Even the ones most often described as selfish individualists come sooner or later to understand that they cannot move ahead by themselves. They learn also that their particular business, and business as a general field, can't move forward without making a contribution to the community it serves.

Perhaps there was a time when business and industry might focus its eyes almost exclusively on its own selfish interests without immediate and visible damage to its interests. The damage was there, but it was so long delayed in appearing that it was lost sight of. We now know that business must contribute more than a product. It must accept its share in public service, political leadership, economic welfare as a whole--and most recently, the welfare of the whole world as a community fit to live in.

In the same time it took a salesman to travel from Boston to Chicago, a century ago, he can now reach any spot on the globe. When jet powered transport planes now under test are perfected, it will be possible to leave London, England just before lunch time, and flying westward to New York, arrive there in time for lunch on the same day. Who then is to say the community we serve is any smaller than the whole world?

And this is not idealism. This is hard, practical business sense. It is the kind of sense it takes to survive. The consequences of economic or political developments in distant countries now travel to us just as fast as do the airplanes. Man has unleashed almost infinite power. The mind of man released and controls the atom. It is, therefore, more powerful than the atom. It is more important to control man's mind than to control the atom--for what happens to the atom reflects what first happens in the minds of men.

No one in American education or industry, particularly on our level of responsibility can ignore these facts and the obligations that go with them. Men's minds are now being enslaved by misinformation and specious political folly. If you and your business are to survive, man must know the truth about them. And you and I need to give it to them--in a form they can understand.

How well do you meet the test of this question? Please do not reject it, for the near future of private enterprise (within your own business expectancy) is threatened by the lack of champions who can intelligently and intelligibly explain its constructive community goals and see that they are attained. The striking fact that escapes too many of us is that the so-called profit system is currently being judged on the base of its contribution to society, and not its returns to private owners. You may or may not agree that this is right; you cannot change the facts. The measuring stick is too plainly in sight to be ignored--and will be ignored only to our sorrow and distress.

It is no longer nonsense to add a new column to our annual balance sheet--a column marked "Contribution to the Community." That column is already added in the

mind of the public, and its profit or loss figure will weigh heavily in the last analysis as the fate of private enterprise is decided.

It is within your power--and mine--to make that community contribution a bigger one--and thus to help insure the continuance of our Free Enterprise profit system. We are no longer dealing with theory. The public (one form of which is government) has given unmistakable evidence of intention to weigh our performance on the scales of the general good. It has said clearly that we will be permitted to continue returning a private profit only if at the same time we return a steady and increasing profit for everyone in the community. The handwriting is very clear--and we had better read it.

That is why I finish my list of questions with this one--and why I dwell perhaps over-long on its importance. To me it seems bound up with the very existence of your job and the possibility of your success. I am certain that an earnest search will reveal in each of your company's policies certain items aimed at promoting the public profit and welfare as well as that of shareholder, management, and employee. If you do not find some such, I recommend that you take steps to insert them. If you do find them--then see that they are stressed and emphasized beyond all previous importance. If you miss this one--you can skip the answers to my previous questions because your job will soon be quite different from its familiar outlines today. This will be true in the fields of business, education, agriculture, and government.

And now we have touched on the first part of your committee-woman's suggestion. We have tried to set up some standards of measurement to help you decide how well you are moving forward in your job. Now let's try the second part of her question. She asked, you remember, whether there are today any barriers likely to keep an able woman from reaching the top in business or allied careers.

I have outlined some of the things I believe are essential to topflight success in any career of our kind. Think back, if you will, and try to find in those questions any hint of gender. Is there any one of them or part of them that applies with more purpose or effect to a man than to a woman? I think not--and I think that fact almost answers the second part of your committee-woman's question. In any case, it's the best answer I can give.

Never in the world's history have the color of a man's skin, his race or religion been less an economic handicap to him than they are today. The world is beginning at long last to judge him more by what he can do than by the songs he sings and the litany he chants. This same thing is true to an even greater extent as between men and women here and there. But is so, they are capable of removal by intelligent, reasoning assault as they never have been before.

If there are impediments, then you can remove them. They are no longer immovable walls. Your ability and enthusiasm are the only limiting factors really. I have tried with my questions to augment your ammunition for this assault, and I hope I have done so. I honestly think you will profit by some sober thought about them. There are many more things I should like to say to you--but time does not permit. I wish I might talk with and know each of you personally. I wish we might have an informal question and answer period. I'd love to have your viewpoints on what I have said--even if it is only that of my helper who said when she heard of my subject, "You, of all people!"

Thank you.

